

Pass on pesticide ban, report urges

Prohibitions difficult to enforce, raise maintenance costs

BY GORDON KENT, EDMONTON JOURNAL FEBRUARY 19, 2011

Edmonton should not join the swarm of Canadian cities banning pesticides because the move could drastically boost weed-control costs without proof of improved human or environmental health, a new report says.

While city staff suggest restrictions are feasible, such as last year's provincewide halt on selling combined fertilizer-herbicide products, they don't want to copy bans that exist in 172 other Canadian cities and towns.

"These types of pesticide bans are difficult to enforce, lead to considerably higher maintenance costs, lead to a decline in green infrastructure and have not demonstrated a measurable contribution to human or environmental health," the report said. A complete prohibition would require almost doubling the city's \$7.2-million budget for fertilizing and mowing to control weeds.

Eliminating pesticides from water treatment would also make it impossible to hold the International Triathlon Union World Cup in Hawrelak Park's lake.

Without the chemicals, Edmonton would also be at greater risk from invasive weeds and insects, including the emerald ash borer which threatens the city's 81,500 ash trees, the report says.

"There is little evidence of objective measures of bylaw success, such as lowered pesticide use statistics, from questionnaires sent to municipal parks, environmental and bylaw staff with pesticide bans."

The Landscape Alberta Nursery Trades Association warned Friday a ban could lead to pest infestations, sports injuries from players slipping on weedy fields and lower property values. "Given the product safety data that is available from federal regulators, we believe that the motivation for a pesticide bylaw is based on the principles of herd mentality and opinion, and not on science," it said in a news release.

But Evie Rodway, a Canadian Cancer Society public policy specialist in Alberta, said her organization still wants Edmonton to act against nonessential pesticide use.

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"There's significant and growing evidence linking pesticides to various types of cancer, as well as other health issues like learning disabilities and reproductive issues," she said.

"Non-essential use would be treating what we consider blemishes, or to enhance the cosmetic look of a lawn. . Weeds can be treated by hand. There are green options you can purchase in stores."

On a cancer society survey last fall, most councillors indicated they support outlawing non-essential pesticides for private and public property, although they didn't call for an immediate ban.

Coun. Karen Leibovici, one of three councillors who asked for the report, said she wants more information on what has happened in other cities.

"A lot of what we're hearing is the same as we heard in 2003 when we looked at the issue," she said, adding that process led to the city's integrated pest management system, which has sharply reduced pesticide use.

The report is scheduled to be discussed Wednesday by council's transportation and public works committee.

gkent@edmontonjournal.com

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